

Who Films Whom?

Towards balanced representations in Quebec cinema

Anna Lupien, Anouk Bélanger and Francine Descarries, in collaboration with Réalisatrices Équitables

Highlights

Fiction Feature Films Released in Quebec in 2019

Only 7 (20%) out of the 35 fiction feature films released in 2011 were directed by women. In 2019, women directed 15 (38%) out of 39 films. While the percentage of women directors is not dramatically low, the gap remains considerable as men directed 9 more films in 2019.

No Gender Mix In the Pairing of Script and Direction

Among the 49 films in this research¹, there is no gender mix in the pairing of script writers and directors. In the corpus under study, every film directed by a woman is scripted by one or a team of women writers. In the same logic, every film directed by a man is written by one or more men. It remains the case for women and men alike who direct a script written by a third party.

Budget

In 2019, female directors received budgets averaging \$1.7 million less than budgets for films directed by men. The average budget of a woman director is \$2,717,667 million, that is to say 63% of the average budget of \$4,432,750 million allocated to their male counterparts.

Leading Role

Women accounted for 84% of the leading roles in films directed by women, while male directors offer leading roles to men 72% of the time.

Top Billing

In movies directed by men in 2019, women remain underrepresented. Women account for only 42% of the main roles, that is to say only a meager advancement of 1% from our prior research. In 2011, women accounted for 41% of male director's top billings.

¹ Since female directors have produced only 15 movies in 2019, in order to have a more equitable base, we have added all the movies directed by women in 2018, that is to say 10 movies.

Speaking Characters

In 2011, speaking characters in films directed by women were distributed somewhat equally (46% of female characters and 54% of male characters) and their casting is balanced for 2019. For male directors, casting remained similar, with fewer women than men. Men account for 61% of the speaking characters in films directed by men.

Racialized Characters

Racialized characters are much more present in films directed by women. In the corpus under study, female directors included 32 racialized characters (17%), while only 17 (9%) feature in films directed by men. In the corpus, only six main characters are part of racialized groups, including three who have been introduced by directors from the same groups.

Indigeneous Characters

5% of Native characters appear in the corpus of films under study. Most of these characters (42 out of 53, or 79%) feature in movies directed or scripted by Native female directors.

Gender and Sexual Diversity

Characters of diverse sexual and/or gender identities are vastly underrepresented, and this is so regardless of the director's gender. Among the 375 protagonists, all of them are cis-gender, and only 10 are not represented as heterosexual.

The Body and Sexualization

The research results published in 2013 showed that male directors are more inclined to sexualize the body of female characters than their female counterparts. Since then, this tendency seems to have receded, but remains present in the gaze of some directors.

Age

Close to half of all the female characters featured by male directors are between 20 and 39 year of age. Women directors have more balanced casting in that regard. Male and female directors alike tend to hire actresses younger than their characters, but the average age difference is almost twice as large with male directors.

Body Image

Directors hold significantly different representations of gendered body image. Directors depict women as skinny or thin 84% of the time, and women directors do so only 67% of the time in their films.

Violence

Male directors include almost twice as many violent scenes than female directors. The former shows 4.25 acts of violence per film and the latter only 2.36.

Professions

Female characters are more likely to hold an identified profession in films directed by women (37% of female characters) than in those directed by men (30% of female characters).

Complexity and Depth of Character

Female characters depicted with depth and complexity are underrepresented in films directed by men – only 4 characters out of 10 – while male characters are well represented 7 out of 10 times. In films directed by women there is more equity: 6 characters out of 10 showed depth and complexity in male and female characters alike.

Care and Domesticity

Gendered stereotypes related to domesticity and care are so deeply culturally embedded that we observe them in films directed by men and women alike.

Interestingly, male directors attach less importance to care and domestic chores. This aspect of social life and individual life experiences are more present in films directed by women as 81% of acts of care or domestic chores feature in women's films.